



**LETTER OF INTEREST DOON PIONEER PARK
COMMUNITY CENTRE**

TARA COOPER

The Doon Community Potluck Project

The word “potluck” or “luck of the pot” as it was called in the 16th century, gained momentum in the 1930’s during the depression to share food resources. “Stone Soup”, an old European folktale shared a similar ethos where villagers brought various foods—potatoes, onions, celery, sweetcorn, chicken, butter—to the cooking pot that began modestly with water and a stone simmering over an open fire. Both stories underscore the power of generosity—how contributions from everyone makes for a delicious, nourishing meal.

Employing the idea of a potluck, my proposal has two parts: 1) a series of community engaged hands-on workshops, and 2) a cut-out collage of imagery and text based on content generated from the workshops that will be bolted to the exterior wall, running the length of the patio.

1) During the residency phase, I will hold a series of 5 workshops (3-5 hours) using the library’s resources such as cookbooks, along with the community room as a maker’s space. Each workshop will be designed for a different audience (e.g. kids, families, adults, teens, date night) and have a different take (e.g. zines, recipe cards, accordion books, paper engineering/pop ups, using methods such as portable letterpress, collage, shadow drawings/wire contours, lino-cuts, and portable screen-printing). However, all would share the prompts: What are you going to bring to the potluck? Do you have a cherished family recipe? What’s your favourite food



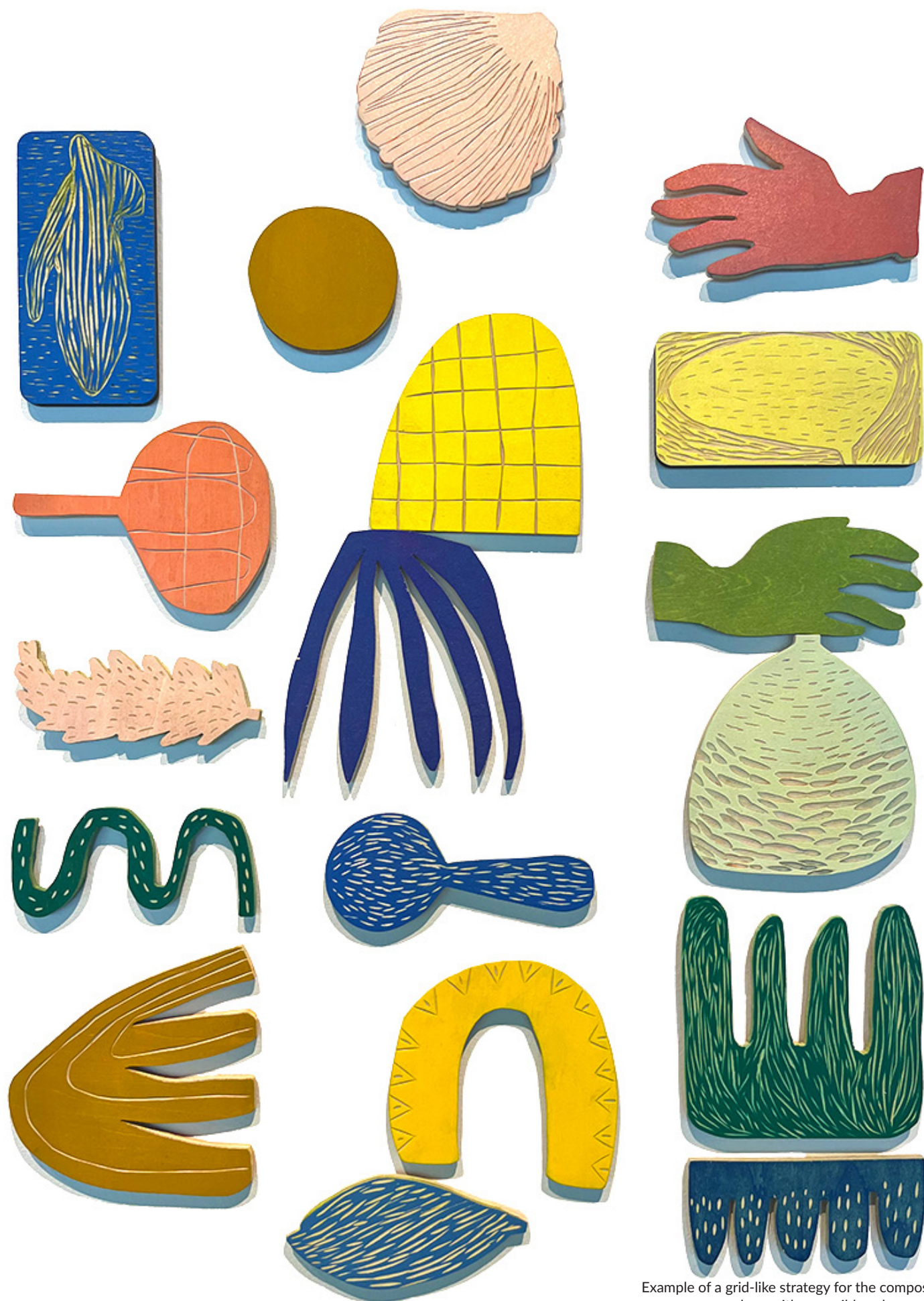
and why? Based on imagery and recipes generated from these workshops, I will design a set of cutouts, including text to illustrate what this giant potluck would be for the Doon Community. I will also research fabrication aspects such as working with marine plywood, ceramics, acrylic, and metal made for outdoor signage in addition to designing the layout.

2) The fabrication phase includes making the cutouts and preparing the fasteners for install, along with any needed coatings to make them durable for the outdoors. I have access through the University to various laser cutters, wood shops, and metals shops and will be on sabbatical during this phase. Ideally, I’d like to cover the entire wall with cut-out pieces collaged into a cohesive composition. The unveiling of the artwork could include a community potluck in celebration, along with a display of any bookish artworks made in the workshops, which could become a permanent part of the library’s collections.



Examples of my cut-out wood pieces, hand-carved and laser cut. The lower image depicts how the cutouts would be installed using a pin method that is bolted to the wall, allowing for some shadow play as a kind of overlapping bas relief.





Example of a grid-like strategy for the composition along with a possible colour palette.



Examples of my CNC router metalwork using steel with my hand-drawn cursive text and drawing of a cloud.





Examples of ceramic tiles made as part of the 3-person artist collective K-DUB Tile Club, which I started this past August. If accepted, I would like to work with the 2 other artists (Mengchao Wu and Daphne Wang) to fabricate the ceramic elements.

Qualifications/Relevant Experience

Teaching

For the past 5 summers I have directed S.A.I.L., the Student Art Innovation Lab, an outreach arts program housed in a restored Airstream trailer. Supported by the University of Waterloo, SAIL hosts art exhibitions, children's crafts, workshops, high school field trips and site-specific temporary installations around the region. Over 20,000 people have participated in SAIL events locally. To make all of this happen, I mentor and work with a team of university students.

I also bring with me decades of teaching experience, which not only includes my work as a professor, but also earlier employment such as running school visits and March break programming for families at the Art Gallery of Ontario, plus teaching children art at a Montessori School. I also teach students how to teach as part of our graduate studies through a Pedagogy in Fine Arts course.

Public Art

I have been on the Board of Directors for CAFKA (6 years) and Waterloo Potter's Workshop (2 years). The former contributing to my knowledge of public artwork—what works and what doesn't work. I made one of the sculptures for the ION project, Tall Tales of Mill Street, which was made in collaboration with my partner Terry O'Neill. Additionally, I have created three local outdoor murals. In 2024, I received a 5-year award for my volunteer work in the region with CAFKA from the province of Ontario.

Studio Practice

Likewise, I've got decades of working as an artist in a range of media (print, video, artist books, ceramics and sculpture), mounting solo exhibitions and site-specific installations for venues such as the Kitchener Waterloo Art Gallery, the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery, the Wassaic Project (Wassaic, New York), Arprim Gallery (Montreal), and SNAP Gallery (Edmonton).



How the Residency will Further Support/Advance my Artistic Development

I have been employing collage-based strategies—the coming together of discrete elements into a larger whole—to produce site-specific installations within a gallery context for many years. Whether it's my “table collages” as seen in “The ocean is the original mood ring” and “God Love Brigus II”, or on the walls and floors like “Reading the Sky” and “Robotic Clay”. All these however, have been temporary indoor exhibitions. What is new for me with Doon is the chance/challenge to apply these maker strategies/my artistic voice within the context of a permanent outdoor artwork, where my intention is to combine a mixture of materials such as ceramic, folded and cut metal, as well as laser-engraved wood. I'm in my early fifties, and as an artist entering a new phase of life, I've been reflecting on what I want out of my studio practice and how I can have an impact on my community. This project hits both goals for me—it will be a challenge in terms of my studio practice, helping me materially realize something new while playing to my maker strengths, but also connect me with my community in terms of being able to impart/share the power of self-expression and storytelling through food and creativity.

In Conclusion

Basically, I've got the maker and teaching chops to pull this off, and I think I can facilitate and design something that will have a positive and lasting impact on the Doon Community. I love the format of this call, how I get to know and work directly with the community (i.e. the people who will live with my art), coupled with the opportunity to make an ambitious permanent artwork.



Woodcuts printed on rice paper.

